

New Federal Permit Holder Requirements

Vessel Safety Compliance

In spring 2006, all federally permitted fishing vessels and/or those participating in Category 1 or Category II fisheries under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) which require mandatory observer coverage will be required to successfully complete the Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examination and display a current safety decal issued within the last two years, with one exception discussed below.

Vessels that fail to satisfy the new safety requirement will be deemed unsafe for purposes of carrying an observer onboard and will be prohibited from fishing. If the vessel fishes without correcting the safety deficiency, NOAA Fisheries Service or the U.S. Coast Guard may take enforcement action.

Observers are also required to complete a pre-trip safety checklist of the emergency equipment onboard vessels. In addition, they are encouraged to review emergency instructions and drills with the operator prior to the vessel departing port.

Vessel owners/operators may be approached by an observer requesting an inspection of the vessel. At that time, the vessel must meet the safety requirements. If the owner/operator refuses to let the observer onboard, they will be deemed out of compliance with the safety regulations.

A waiver to the requirements may be granted by the agency as long as the U.S. Coast Guard deficiency list, provided by the inspector to a failing vessel, includes only marine sanitation equipment.

Observers collect data for use in the management of commercial fisheries, research on bycatch reduction, and monitoring of protected species and incidental takes. They conduct marine mammal haul watches, record incidental takes of protected species, record discards, conduct biological sampling of catch and collection of specimens, and measure various gear characteristics.

To schedule a dockside safety inspection, contact a Marine Safety Officer Dockside Examiner (USCG):

Portland, ME	207-780-3256
Boston, MA	617-223-3045
Providence, RI	508-999-0072
Long Island, NY, CT	203-468-4437
Baltimore, MD	410-576-2526
Hampton Roads, VA	757-668-5535
Philadelphia, PA	215-271-4852
Wilmington, NC	910-772-2231
Atlantic Beach, NC	252-247-4562

The agency will distribute a permit holder letter with further details including the date the decal will be required. To view the list of fisheries that require an observer, visit the Observer Program's website at: www.nefsc.noaa.gov/femad/fsb. Questions may be referred to David Potter, Observer Program Director, at 508-495-2262.